



**STATE OF VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501**

MEMORANDUM

**To: Donald E. Collins, Chair, Senate Education Committee
George Cross, Chair, House Education Committee**

c: State Board of Education, Superintendents, VSA, VPA, VSBA, VT-NEA

From: Richard H. Cate, Commissioner

Re: Annual Report on Act 150 of 2000, Public School Choice in Grades 9-12

Date: January 15, 2005

This is the fourth annual report required by Act 150. It provides information on how schools have implemented the law and the extent to which students have participated, focusing chiefly on the current school year. This report supplements the quantitative information about students participating in choice during the first two years, with qualitative findings from a study completed by UVM researchers (see attached study).

Act 150 reports for 2003 and 2004 reports are available on the department's Web site, at www.state.vt.us/educ/; look for Act 150 under "Laws and Regulations."

School Choice Participants

"Other" and Unknown" appear in this report due to incomplete reports from schools.

The number of students who applied to enroll in other schools is 151. Of that number, 76 students actually enrolled. This is .2 percent of the total number of students in grades 9-12. Of the cumulative number of students who have transferred under Act 150 during the last three years, 224 students (.8 percent of the total population) are currently active participants.

The schools with the highest number of reported new enrollees this year are: South Burlington (14), U32 (9), Burlington (8), Lake Region (7), and North Country (7). Together, these schools account for 59 percent of newly enrolled students. The schools with the highest number of reported transfers are: Champlain Valley (7), North Country (7), and Winooski (6).

The gender distribution of students exercising choice was substantially equivalent to the gender distribution of all students. As in past years, participation by students receiving free or reduced

price lunches and by special education students was consistent with the groups' proportionate representation in the entire high school population.

Schools either with technical centers or with access to them were chosen by students exercising choice at relatively higher rates than schools without such access. Given the low number of small schools and students from them exercising choice, no generalizations can be made about these data.

This year, 24 schools (40 percent of the total) had no students transferring to other schools and no students enrolling in their school. An additional 17 schools (28 percent) had no students transferring to other schools; and 11 schools (18 percent) had no students enrolling in their school. Taken together, in these 52 schools (86 percent) there were: (1) no participants either way, (2) no transfers, or (3) no enrollments.

Only a few schools either provided transportation to students exercising choice or were asked to provide it. While the reported data showed a moderately disparate impact on males by transferring lotteries, there was no measurable disparate impact from enrolling lotteries for females or males. There was no apparent disparate impact within lotteries for students receiving free or reduced priced lunches or for special education students.

Composition of School Choice Regions

As described in Appendix C, there were very few changes in the composition of school choice regions this year.

The quantitative and qualitative data in this report will inform any discussion about school choice. However, the limited participation by students makes it impossible to draw specific conclusions from the data.

On January 18, 2005, the State Board of Education will complete its review of proposed draft legislation addressing the issue of public school choice. The legislation includes the following elements:

- A program of public school choice throughout the state and at all grade levels, kindergarten through grade 12.
- In the first year of implementation, the sending school would retain two-thirds of the ADM and the receiving school would claim one-third ADM for each student. In the second year, the sending and receiving schools would share the ADM equally. In the third year and thereafter, the receiving school would claim the entire ADM for each student.
- There would be no cap on the number of students eligible to participate in the program.
- Transportation would be the responsibility of the parents unless school districts decided to provide it.
- The capacity of schools to receive choice students would be decided by the school boards of the receiving schools using objective guidelines established by the commissioner.
- Special education and the cost thereof would remain the responsibility of the district of residence.

I will forward the proposed legislation as soon as it is approved by the State Board of Education.

Attachments:

Appendix A, Act 150 Tables

Appendix B, Choice Data by School

Appendix C, School Choice Regions, 2004-2005

Appendix D, Act 150 Study by UVM Researchers

Appendix A Act 150 Tables

Table 1: High Schools Reporting

	FY03	FY04	FY05
Number of High Schools	61	61	61
Number of High Schools Reporting	61	61	60

Table 2: Student Participation

	FY03	FY04 *	FY05 *
Number requesting enrollment	221	188	151
Number enrolled	161	121	76
Number accepted but not enrolled	36	24	38
Number denied choice	18	33	36
Other	6	10	1

*Students reported in prior years are not included in these totals

Table 3: Cumulative Student Participation

FY03	FY04		FY05	
Act 150 Students	New Act 150 Students	Cumulative Total	New Act 150 Students	Cumulative Total
161	121	224	76	224

Table 4: Technical Center Data

	Number of Schools	Number of Students Enrolling	Number Transferring out	Schools with Net Loss
Schools with Local Tech Centers	14	35	17	0%
Schools without Local Tech Centers	46	41	34	26%

Table 5: Small Schools Data

	Number of Schools	Number of Enrolling	Number of Transferring out	Schools with Net Loss
Schools 25 or fewer graduates	5	4	0	0%
Schools with more than 25 graduates	55	72	51	22%

Table 6: Choice Enrollment Data

	Total number of 9-12th grade students in Vermont public high schools*		Total number of 9-12th grade students requesting enrollment*		Total number of 9-12th grade students enrolled		Total number of 9-12th grade students denied enrollment	
Total	28,542		151	0.5%	76	50.3%	36	23.8%
Gender								
Female	14,729	51.6%	72	47.7%	37	48.7%	17	47.2%
Male	13,813	48.4%	63	41.7%	37	48.7%	12	33.3%
Unknown**	0	0.0%	16	10.6%	2	2.6%	7	19.4%
Special Ed								
With IEP	3,755	13.1%	19	12.6%	4	5.3%	4	11.1%
Without IEP	24,887	86.9%	132	87.4%	72	94.7%	32	88.9%
Poverty								
Free/Red.	5,676	19.9%	25	16.6%	13	17.1%	6	16.7%
No Free/Red.	22,866	80.1%	110	72.8%	61	80.3%	23	63.9%
Unknown**	0	0.0%	16	10.6%	2	2.6%	7	19.4%
Grade Level								
9	7,871	27.6%	64	42.4%	35	46.1%	17	47.2%
10	7,294	25.6%	28	18.5%	14	18.4%	6	16.7%
11	6,851	24.0%	26	17.2%	13	17.1%	5	13.9%
12	6,526	22.9%	17	11.3%	12	15.8%	1	2.8%
Unknown**	0	0.0%	16	10.6%	2	2.6%	7	19.4%

* The total 9-12 student counts are estimated because the student census data collection was incomplete at time of publication

** The high number of unknown counts is due to timing of this year's student census data collection

Table 7: Transportation Data

	Yes	No	No Answer
Does your school provide transportation assistance for enrolled Act 150 students?	1	58	1
Does your school provide transportation assistance for transferring Act 150 students?	1	56	3
Has your school been asked to provide transportation assistance for enrolled Act 150 students?	5	33	1
Has your school been asked to provide transportation assistance for transferring Act 150 students?	3	34	3

Table 8: Choice Transfer Data

	Total number of 9-12th grade students in Vermont public high schools*		Total number of 9-12th grade students requesting transfer out		Total number of 9-12th grade students that actually transferred out		Total number of 9-12th grade students denied transfer out	
Total	28,542		174	0.6%	76	43.7%	23	13.2%
Gender								
Female	14,729	51.6%	79	45.4%	37	48.7%	5	21.7%
Male	13,813	48.4%	89	51.1%	37	48.7%	15	65.2%
Unknown**	0	0.0%	6	3.4%	2	2.6%	3	13.0%
Special Ed								
With IEP	3,755	13.1%	22	12.6%	4	5.3%	4	17.4%
Without IEP	24,887	86.9%	152	87.4%	72	94.7%	19	82.6%
Poverty								
Free/Red Lunch	5,676	19.9%	27	15.5%	13	17.1%	1	4.3%
No Free/Red Lunch	22,866	80.1%	141	81.0%	61	80.3%	19	82.6%
Unknown**	0	0.0%	6	3.4%	2	2.6%	3	13.0%
Grade Level								
9	7,871	27.6%	68	39.1%	35	46.1%	10	43.5%
10	7,294	25.6%	33	19.0%	14	18.4%	3	13.0%
11	6,851	24.0%	37	21.3%	13	17.1%	5	21.7%
12	6,526	22.9%	30	17.2%	12	15.8%	2	8.7%
Unknown**	0	0.0%	6	3.4%	2	2.6%	3	13.0%

*The total 9-12 student counts are estimated because the student census data collection was incomplete at time of publication

**The high number of unknown counts is due to a delay in finalizing this year's student census data

Appendix B Choice Data by School

School ID	School Name	Transfer Capacity FY05	Enrollment Capacity FY05	Students Transferred Out By Act 150 FY03	Additional Students with Confirmed Transfer Out By Act 150 Reported in FY04	Additional Students with Confirmed Transfer Out By Act 150 Reported in FY05	Students Enrolled By Act 150 FY03	Additional Students Enrolled By Act 150 Reported in FY04	Additional Students Enrolled By Act 150 Reported in FY05	Small High School*	Local Technical Center
Statewide Totals		512	532	161	120	76	161	120	76	5	14
PS011	ARLINGTON MEMORIAL	4	4	0	1	0	3	4	4	No	No
PS025	BELLOWS FALLS UHSD #2	14		10	2	0	1	0	0	No	No
PS027	BELLOWS FREE ACADEMY			0	0	0	0	0	0	No	No
PS035	BLACK RIVER USD #39		10	5	3	1	0	1	0	No	No
PS036	BLUE MOUNTAIN USD #21	1	2	1	2	0	1	1	0	No	No
PS040	BRATTLEBORO UHSD #6	4	4	0	0	1	3	3	4	No	Yes
PS052	BURLINGTON SENIOR HIG	15	15	3	5	4	3	8	8	No	Yes
PS055	CABOT SCHOOL	5	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	No	No
PS059	CANAAN SCHOOLS	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	Yes	No
PS066	CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UHSD	40	5	0	8	7	0	1	0	No	No
PS069	CHELSEA ELEM. HIGH SC	10	10	1	0	1	0	0	0	No	No
PS072	COLCHESTER HIGH SCHOO			1	0	0	2	0	0	No	No
PS074	CONCORD SCHOOL	3	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	Yes	No
PS078	CRAFTSBURY SCHOOLS	3	3	1	0	0	1	1	0	Yes	No
PS082	DANVILLE SCHOOL	10	10	0	0	0	2	1	0	No	No
PS098	ENOSBURG FALLS JR/SR	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	No	Yes
PS388	ESSEX COMM. ED. CTR.	10	10	0	1	0	1	0	0	No	Yes
PS104	FAIR HAVEN UHSD #16	5	5	7	1	0	7	3	0	No	No
PS124	GREEN MOUNTAIN UHSD #	24	24	2	1	0	16	6	2	No	No
PS134	HARTFORD HIGH SCHOOL	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	No	Yes
PS138	HARWOOD UHSD #19	10	10	3	1	0	0	0	1	No	No
PS139	HAZEN UHSD #26	10	10	1	2	1	0	0	0	No	No
PS157	LAKE REGION UHSD #24	15	15	6	5	5	4	6	7	No	No
PS158	LAMOILLE UHSD #18	5	5	3	0	0	3	0	2	No	Yes
PS161	LELAND AND GRAY UHSD	10	10	0	2	1	2	0	1	No	No
PS180	MIDDLEBURY SR. UHSD #	10	10	0	1	0	6	6	2	No	Yes
PS183	MILL RIVER USD #40	2	2	4	1	2	20	2	1	No	No
PS186	MILTON SR HIGH SCHOOL	0	16	0	0	0	0	1	0	No	No
PS187	MISSISQUOI VALLEY UHS	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	No	No
PS191	MONTPELIER HIGH SCHOO	10	10	6	9	0	15	4	0	No	No
PS195	MOUNT ABRAHAM UHSD #2	21	10	5	3	2	0	1	0	No	No
PS196	MT. ANTHONY SR. UHSD	6	10	3	3	0	0	3	1	No	Yes
PS199	MT. MANSFIELD USD #17	10	10	2	0	0	1	0	1	No	No
PS208	NORTH COUNTRY SR UHSD	16	16	2	4	7	6	7	7	No	Yes
PS211	NORTHFIELD MIDDLE/HIG	6	6	0	1	0	1	0	0	No	No
PS219	OTTER VALLEY UHSD #8	12	12	10	4	4	3	3	0	No	No
PS220	OXBOW UHSD #30	6	6	1	1	0	1	2	0	No	Yes
PS224	PEOPLES ACADEMY	6	6	2	1	1	4	3	0	No	No
PS230	POULTNEY HIGH SCHOOL	8	8	5	1	1	0	0	0	No	No
PS233	PROCTOR JR/SR HIGH SC	5	5	2	2	0	5	1	4	Yes	No
PS237	RANDOLPH UHSD #2	8	8	1	0	0	4	1	1	No	Yes
PS242	RICHFORD JR/SR HIGH S	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	No	No
PI004	RIVENDELL ACADEMY	4	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	No	No
PS247	ROCHESTER SCHOOL	6	6	1	0	0	0	1	0	Yes	No
PS253	RUTLAND SENIOR HIGH S	5	5	2	2	2	13	4	5	No	Yes
PS272	SO. BURLINGTON HIGH S	25	25	1	0	0	1	14	11	No	No
PS274	SO. ROYALTON ELEM/HIG	8	8	1	0	1	2	0	0	No	No
PS276	SPAULDING HSUD #41	10	6	7	3	3	5	4	4	No	Yes
PS278	SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHO	20	20	1	0	0	2	3	1	No	Yes
PS287	STOWE MIDDLE/HIGH SCH	6	6	2	1	0	5	3	2	No	No
PS304	TWINFIELD USD #33	10	10	1	0	0	1	4	2	No	No
PS305	U32 HIGH SCHOOL (UHSD	10	10	12	4	0	6	9	2	No	No

Vermont Department of Education

School ID	School Name	Transfer Capacity FY05	Enrollment Capacity FY05	Students Transferred Out By Act 150 FY03	Additional Students with Confirmed Transfer Out By Act 150 Reported in FY04	Additional Students with Confirmed Transfer Out By Act 150 Reported in FY05	Students Enrolled By Act 150 FY03	Additional Students Enrolled By Act 150 Reported in FY04	Additional Students Enrolled By Act 150 Reported in FY05	Small High School*	Local Technical Center
Statewide Totals		512	532	161	120	76	161	120	76	5	14
PS312	VERGENNES UHSD #5	10	10	2	2	0	1	0	1	No	No
PS331	WEST RUTLAND SCHOOL	6	10	5	3	0	2	2	1	No	No
PS338	WHITCOMB JR/SR HIGH SCHOOL	5	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	No	No
PS341	WHITINGHAM SCHOOL**			1	2		0	0			
PS344	WILLIAMSTOWN MIDDLE/HIGH SC	5	5	2	0	0	3	2	0	No	No
PS346	TWIN VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL	0	50	0	1	0	1	2	1	No	No
PS348	WINDSOR HIGH SCHOOL	6		0	0	0	0	0	0	No	No
PS351	WINOOSKI HIGH SCHOOL	8	8	2	4	6	2	2	0	No	No
PS356	WOODSTOCK SR. UHSD #4	4	4	0	0	0	1	1	0	No	No
	UNKNOWN			31	31	25					

* UNKNOWN represents students who enrolled in a school Act 150 but the transferring school is not known. The majority of these students are 8th graders during the Act 150 l

**Merged with Wilmington High School to create Twin Valley High School

Appendix C
Public High Schools – Composition of School Choice Regions Under Act 150
School Year 2004-2005 - Vermont Department of Education – Revised December 2004

Note: Schools in Addison County (three schools), Rutland County (seven schools), Southeast Region (10 schools), and Winooski Valley (16 schools), are included individually on this list and are also listed by groups at the end. For some listings, a semi-colon indicates two separate regions; for example, see Burlington. Apart from the groups cited above (which account for sixty percent of Act 150 high schools), most schools are in regions with one or two other schools. This year, 60 schools are members of 21 regions. Eight schools are members of two regions.

School	Partners	Agreement (on file = X)
Arlington Memorial	Mt. Anthony	X
BFA-Fairfax	Lamoille Union High School	X
Bellows Falls UHSD #27	Southeast Region	X
Black River USD #39	Southeast Region	X
Blue Mountain Union	Oxbow	X
Brattleboro UHSD #6	Southeast Region	X
Burlington High School	Winooski; CVU and So. Burlington	X; X
Cabot School	Winooski Valley	X
Canaan Memorial High School	Lake Region and North Country	X
Champlain Valley UHSD #15	Burlington and So. Burlington; Winooski	X; X
Chelsea High School	Winooski Valley	X
Colchester High School	Mt. Mansfield	X
Concord High School	Danville	X
Craftsbury Academy	Winooski Valley	X
Danville School	Concord	X
Enosburg Falls High School	Richford High School	X
Essex UHSD #46	So. Burlington	
Fair Haven UHSD #16	Rutland County School Choice Collaborative	X
Green Mountain UHSD #35	Southeast Region	X
Hartford High School	Southeast Region	X

School	Partners	Agreement (on file = X)
Harwood UHSD #19	Winooski Valley	X
Hazen UHSD #26	Winooski Valley	X
Lake Region UHSD #24	Canaan and North Country	X
Lamoille UHSD #18	BFA-Fairfax; Winooski Valley	X; X
Leland & Gray	Southeast Region	X
Middlebury	Mt. Abraham and Vergennes	X
Mill River USD #40	Rutland County School Choice Collaborative	X
Milton High School	Missisquoi; Winooski	X; X
Missisquoi Valley UHSD #7	Milton	X
Montpelier High School	U-32 High School	X
Mt. Abraham	Middlebury and Vergennes	X
Mt. Anthony	Whitingham/Wilmington; Arlington	X; X
Mt. Mansfield USD #17	Colchester	X
North Country UHSD #22	Canaan and Lake Region	X
Northfield High School	Winooski Valley	X
Otter Valley UHSD #8	Rutland County School Choice Collaborative	X
Oxbow UHSD #30	Blue Mountain	X
Peoples Academy	Winooski Valley	X
Poultney High School	Rutland County School Choice Collaborative	X
Proctor High School	Rutland County School Choice Collaborative	X
Randolph UHSD #2	Winooski Valley	X
Richford High School	Enosburg Falls High School	X
Rivendell High School	Southeast Region	X
Rochester School	Winooski Valley	X
Rutland Senior High School	Rutland County School Choice Collaborative	X
So. Burlington High School	Essex; Burlington and CVU	X; X
So. Royalton High School	Winooski Valley	X
Spaulding High School	Winooski Valley	X
Springfield High School	Southeast Region	X

School	Partners	Agreement (on file = X)
Stowe High School	Winooski Valley	X
Twinfield Union High School	Winooski Valley	X
U-32 High School (UHSD #32)	Montpelier	X
Vergennes	Middlebury and Mt. Abraham	X
West Rutland School	Rutland County School Choice Collaborative	X
Whitcomb High School	Winooski Valley	X
Whitingham/Wilmington	Mt. Anthony	X
Williamstown High School	Winooski Valley	X
Windsor High School	Southeast Region	X
Winooski High School	Burlington; Milton; CVU	X; X; X
Woodstock High School	Southeast Region	X

Addison County Regional Public High School Choice Partnership - 3

Middlebury, Mt. Abraham, and Vergennes

Winooski Valley Region Public School Choice Collaborative - 16

Cabot	Craftsbury	Hazen	Northfield
Rochester	Spaulding	Twinfield	Whitcomb
Chelsea	Harwood	Lamoille Union	Peoples Academy
South Royalton	Stowe	Williamstown	Randolph

Southeast Region - 10

Bellows Falls	Rivendell	Green Mountain	Hartford
Leland & Gray	Brattleboro	Windsor	Woodstock
Black River	Springfield		

Rutland County School Choice Collaborative - 7

Fair Haven UHSD	Otter Valley UHSD #8	Proctor High School	West Rutland School
Mill River USD #40	Poultney High School	Rutland City	

**A Study of the Implementation of Vermont's Act 150 of 2000,
Public School Choice in Grades 9-12**

**Submitted to
Richard H. Cate
Commissioner of Education
State of Vermont
Department of Education**

**Prepared by
Susan Hasazi, Ed.D.
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**With the assistance of
Patty Morgan**

January 7, 2005

A Study and Report on the Implementation of Act 150 of 2000, Public School Choice in Grades 9-12

I. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of Vermont's school choice policy from the perspectives of a sample of administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and students. The study was initiated by the legislature to examine outcomes and processes associated with Act 150, and was conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Vermont who were contracted to complete the study by the Commissioner of Education. The study was conducted during the months of October through December, 2004, and involved site visits, face to face interviews, and telephone interviews with a total of 129 interviewees across 20 sites. Total numbers of interviewees across sites were as follows: 20 superintendents, 21 principals, 18 guidance counselors, 6 school board members, 32 parents and 32 students.

Three general areas of inquiry guided this study. Of great importance was understanding the motivating **reasons for participation in school choice**, from the perspective of both students and parents. Second, the study design addressed **questions of participant satisfaction**, such as: Were parents and students that engaged in school choice, that is transferred from an assigned school to a choice school, satisfied with the application procedures, social experiences and educational opportunities provided in their choice school? The study design also inquired as to a variety of **structural issues in school settings that may impact the implementation of school choice policy**. Questions surrounding this area of inquiry included: Whether transportation issues impeded student participation in school choice? Whether students receiving special education services had equal access to school choice programs? These three areas of inquiry are more specifically addressed in each of the interview protocols developed for school personnel, parents and students. The complete list of these questions are provided in Appendix A.

II. Data Collection, Analysis and Limitations

The data collection design of the study was primarily qualitative in nature, with additional quantitative data collected from public records available at the local and state levels (e.g., numbers of students participating in school choice programs). The selection of study sites, students and parents for inclusion in the interview portion of the study involved both purposeful and random sampling procedures.

A Study and Report on the Implementation of Act 150 of 2000, Public School Choice in Grades 9-12

Selection of the Sites

The study design employed two criteria in the selection of schools for participation in the study. The first criteria focused on schools that participated “heavily” in school choice during the FY 2003 and FY 2004 school years. Heavy or high participation in school choice was calculated using data from the 2004 Annual Report on Act 150 School Choice. The count of students exiting and enrolling in a school was first added together and then averaged between the two study years. All schools were then ranked by this two year average. The five schools with the highest average were selected for intensive one day site visits. From a policy relevance perspective, in FY 2003 these five schools alone accounted for 44% of all students enrolling in a new high school through school choice, and 21% in FY 2004.

The second selection criteria sought to randomly select high schools from across Vermont and therefore insure variability in school setting. Of the 61 high schools included in the Annual Report, seven schools did not have any students entering or exiting via a school choice process during FY 2003 or 2004. Fifteen of the remaining 54 schools (or 27%) were then selected using a random number seed algorithm provided in the SPSS 12.0.

The study reports the results of 129 interviews with school personnel, parents and students from twenty different high schools, which is equivalent to 35% of Vermont high schools that participate in school choice.

Selection of Interviewees

In most school settings the research team interviewed a school district superintendent, a high school principal and a guidance counselor. School board members participated in interviews in six districts. A total of sixty five school personnel participated in the study across the twenty sites. (See Appendix B. Table 1)

The selection of students and parents for interviews involved a three step sampling procedure. In the first step, a database of students participating in choice from the twenty high schools was compiled by State Department of Education staff. This database contained the names of students participating in the Act 150 School Choice program as of the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school

A Study and Report on the Implementation of Act 150 of 2000, Public School Choice in Grades 9-12

years. From this database, students that had successfully transferred into one of the 20 sampled high schools were initially selected.

Second, student records were then alphabetized first by high school, and then by student last name. The third step involved the actual selection of student names from the database. Given that two years (FY 03 and FY 04) of student data were provided, we anticipated that some students would have graduated by the fall of 2004. As such, whenever possible five names were selected from each school, three from 2003 and two from 2004. In nine out of 13 high schools, we were not able to select five students due to the limited number of students participating in school choice. In total, sixty two names were selected, 36 from 2003 and 26 from 2004. Of the students selected from 2003, 18, or 50%, had graduated. Only four students, or 15%, had graduated from the 2004 list.

Final steps for student selection involved school administrators sending a letter to each of the identified families. The letter introduced parents to the purpose of the study and invited them to participate. If parents or students did not want to be interviewed, they were instructed to notify the school principal in which case they would not be contacted by the research team.

Additionally, when the interviewers contacted students' homes, parents were asked again for their consent to participate in an interview, and for consent for their son or daughter (if under 18) to participate. Finally, prior to conducting student interviews, students were asked whether or not they wished to participate in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to address the above research questions in an efficient and effective manner, qualitative methods¹ were utilized in individual and group interviews with key stakeholders, including school superintendents, principals, guidance counselors, school board members, parents, and students. Standard interview questions were developed and used with interviewees in each of the above categories. The interview questions were designed to capture the direct experiences, opinions and feelings of participants of Act 150, and were derived from language contained in the

¹ See Glesne, C. (1999). Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction (2nd edition). White Plains, NY: Longman; Miles, M., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage;

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statute. The interview questions were administered in face to face meetings in seven high school settings, including each of the five schools that participated heavily in school choice. The remaining interviews were administered via the telephone. The interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes with school personnel and school board members, and 20 minutes with both parents and students.

In addition to these formal interviews, we sought to ascertain how students in general understood the Act 150 School Choice program at their high school. We informally interviewed between eight and twelve male and female students at five of the sites visited. These interviews were conducted with students seated in the cafeteria or socializing between classes. Students were asked whether they had heard of the school choice program or knew of anyone participating in school choice.

Field notes for each interview were transcribed and analyzed collaboratively by the four member team. Responses were coded, by question, for the following two primary categories of interviewees: school personnel, including superintendents, principals, guidance counselors, and school board members; and parents and students. For each of the two groups, common themes were identified for each interview question, with results reported accordingly.

Limitations

The study design benefited greatly from the active cooperation of school administrators in each of the study sites and as a result the data limitations are quite minimal. However, three relevant limitations remain. First, two of the high schools participated in school choice by transferring students to other high schools, and as such, did not enroll any students. Those schools were Hazen UHSD and Whitcomb Jr./Sr. High School. As a result, interviews were conducted with school personnel, but not with students or parents from those two schools. Second, in one high school (Colchester), each of the students participating in school choice during the study years graduated by fall of 2004. As a result, interviews were conducted with school personnel only. Third, in one high school (Rochester), the research team was unable to contact the one parent and student participating in school choice for participation in the study. As a result, interviews were conducted with school personnel only.

III. Results

Results of the study are reported in two sections. Section A reports findings derived from interviews with superintendents, principals, and guidance counselors conducted either on site or on the telephone across the 20 school sites, while Section B reports the findings of telephone interviews with parents and students. The findings were derived from an analysis of transcribed on-site and telephone interviews, with responses coded and reported by question. The interview questions for school personnel as well as parents and students are included in Appendix A.

Section A: Results of Interviews with Superintendents, Principals, and Guidance Counselors

Methods of Communication to Parents and Students Regarding School Choice Options and Procedures

According to the interviewees, the three most commonly used methods of communication were direct mailing of information regarding school choice, daily announcements for a short period time prior to the application deadlines, and school newsletters. Additional methods for communicating information regarding school choice occurred through public information forums, community newsletters, newspapers, public access television, and course registration or program of studies manuals. Some schools used up to four of the above methods of communication, while most used one or two approaches.

The interviewees were also queried about the use of lotteries to select students applying for school choice programs. About one half of the schools were currently using a lottery system, while the remaining schools' lotteries had not activated a lottery system because of low demand.

Reasons Parents and Students Pursue School Choice

The interviewees reported that parents and students pursued school choice for a variety of reasons. The six most commonly cited reasons included: 1) a desire to pursue academic options not available in the student's home school, 2) availability of different sports and/or increased opportunities to participate in sports at another school, 3) situations in which families moved and

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students wished to remain in their former community schools, 4) a situation frequently described as the “fresh start” issue, primarily around students’ needs for new social networks, 5) a desire for students to attend schools in a geographic location close to where their parents worked, especially teachers whose children chose to attend the school in which they taught, and 6) a desire for a different school environment or climate. The last frequently related to the size of the selected school, with some students wanting larger schools, and others smaller schools. Additional reasons for pursuing school choice cited in three or fewer situations included: wanting to be with friends, attending a school in a geographic location that was closer than their assigned community school, choosing a school which parents had attended, and attending a technical center and finding it

easier to attend the attached high school than to travel between schools. One superintendent noted that while the reasons for school choice were varied, most centered on maximizing opportunities for individual student and family situations: *“Why do parents and kids do it? Each kid is unique and they are looking for a good match.”*

Reasons for Students Not Being Selected

This situation was not common, but there were some cases in which there were more students applying for school choice than could be accommodated. In these cases, a lottery system was used, and some students were not selected. The interviewees also described a very small number of situations in which students applied for school choice and were accepted, but chose not to participate. Reasons for not participating included transportation, and having “a change of heart” after being accepted, often for social reasons.

Reasons for Not Applying

The interviewees overwhelmingly reported that most students do not consider applying for school choice because they identify with and are connected to their home school, community and friendship networks. Additional reasons cited included transportation hurdles, and a long tradition of family history in the school.

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Degree to Which Transportation Is a Barrier

Transportation surfaced as a major barrier in virtually all sites, particularly for students and families with limited resources. The interviewees were concerned about transportation barriers, because they appeared to lead to an inherent inequity in the current school choice model. As one superintendent located in a rural area stated, *“As far as transportation goes, I worry about equity. We have over a 50% poverty rate, and families without resources are not going to be able to provide transportation.”* Many of the interviewees believed that it would not be feasible for the state to fund transportation at a level that would overcome these inequities, especially if the program were to be expanded. However, students in households with more financial resources were able to transport themselves via personal vehicles, or to have their parents transport them to and from their choice school. This was often the case when the parents worked in the area of the school of choice, or work in the school. In a very small number of schools, administrators were able to make arrangements for some of these students via existing school transportation services.

General Satisfaction with the Current School Choice Process

Overall, the interviewees reported satisfaction with the current state policy and the processes they have developed within their regions to meet the needs of individual students. They generally perceive the school choice program as enabling students to achieve goals and realize opportunities not available in their home schools. In this sense, the design of the current school choice program did not present a significant departure from existing, informal agreements that had historically allowed students to enroll in schools other than their assigned school. According to one superintendent, *“The current policy is no big deal...it’s small and manageable. It builds on some informal agreements that some schools have had in the past.”*

At the present time, the process meets the needs of a small number of students and families. One principal noted that *“Most parents and students are satisfied,”* while another commented that *“It provides opportunities for some kids to pursue areas of interest not available in their own schools, such as sports, arts, and AP courses.”* Given the relatively small utilization of this program, a vast majority of administrators added that the school choice program in their school was not a major area of administrative concern.

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There were, however, three areas of concern, stress, or dissatisfaction that emerged in the interviews. First, though resources follow students receiving special education services from their home district, resources do not follow students with 504 plans. Administrators reported that this presented financial challenges to providing appropriate services. Second, since resources in general do not follow students, some schools that received more students than they sent reported stress on their current capacity. Some schools responded to the stress by reducing the numbers of students they were willing to accept yearly under the school choice policy.

Third, a vast majority of the interviewees were concerned about what might happen if the State's choice program were to be expanded. Areas of concern revolved around how expansion could negatively affect small schools through loss of enrollment and possible funding, as well as a loss of community. If expansion were to occur, the interviewees believed that it would be necessary for money to follow students and for transportation to be provided to ensure equity for all students.

The interviewees reported general satisfaction among parents and students involved in choice. One exception to parent and student satisfaction was noted in a small number of schools where high numbers of applicants resulted in the use of a lottery system, and some students were not selected. Another concern, while noted in only one or two schools, related to problems with the application process. A superintendent in one district reported that: *"There are some regions where superintendents change the rules regarding the number of students eligible to participate in school choice, as well as the deadlines for applications."*

Access Issues for Students Receiving Special Educational or Other Support Services

The interviewees reported that equal opportunity for students receiving special education or other support services was achieved through an application process that was based on anonymous selection of students. Some interviewees noted, however, that parents of children receiving special education services might be less likely to consider school choice because of issues associated with the portability and consistency of the supports and services needed by their child.

Changes in Parental Involvement as a Result of School Choice:

The interviewees reported that the school choice application process necessitated a significant level of parent involvement in their child's education. Outside of the application process, however, parents of children involved in school choice did not appear to have higher levels of involvement than those of other parents. On the whole, parents were reported to have different levels of involvement, which were not influenced by school choice participation.

Reasons Why Students Engaged in School Choice Return to Their Home School

According to the interviewees, the vast majority of students remained in their school choice placements. For those who returned, administrators reported a variety of reasons for the change. Most of these reasons revolved around a mismatch of one kind or another, such as students who had hoped to play on varsity sports teams and were not selected, or students who experienced difficulty in identifying with new peer groups.

Concerns Associated with School Choice Policies

There were only a few interviewees who identified unintended consequences associated with the present policy. In general, the program was perceived as being too small to generate large scale unintended consequences. They did, however, identify a number of concerns and suggestions for improvement. These are reported below, under the major themes of resources and equity, and program concerns.

Resource and equity issues

- “Money needs to follow students.” A number of the interviewees discussed the need for money to follow students, but some believed this should happen under the current program, whereas others saw this as a concern only if school choice programs were to be significantly expanded.

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- *“If we’re going to have real choice in Vermont, the state will have to support transportation, otherwise it won’t be equitable.”* Most interviewees saw state supported transportation as a necessity if school choice programs were to be expanded; however, they also saw the cost as unrealistic.

- *“The impact on small schools needs to be considered.”* A majority of the interviewees recognized small schools as being vulnerable to the fiscal realities of school choice, especially if the program were to be expanded. One superintendent described it this way:

“If we go further down the school choice road there will be winners and losers. The tough thing is, we would probably be a winner, but it makes me concerned about the smaller schools around us. There are interactive effects between declining enrollment and school choice.”

- *“We need to spend our resources on making our own schools better, and engaging parents at the secondary level.”* A small number of the interviewees discussed the purpose of school choice, and options such as creating specialized programs within schools, and/or offering options for students to take courses at other schools without participating in the full program. One superintendent commented that:

“The current school choice policy is not a driver for school improvement. Are we doing it because the school is not working well, or can we address school improvement another way?”

Program Concerns

- *“We need to get better about publicizing school choice to kids and parents.”* While the interviewees have been attempting to publicize information on school choice, they acknowledged that more work needed to be done to ensure that a broader range of students and families were aware of the program.

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- *“School choice is just fine as it is. Don’t expand it.”* The overwhelming majority of the interviewees indicated that they thought the current school choice program works well, given its purpose and processes.

Section B: Results of Interviews with Parents and Students

Methods of Communication to Parents and Students Regarding School Choice Options and Procedures

Parents and students reported that they learned about school choice in a variety of ways, including communications from the sending school. Many parents sought information from school personnel regarding school choice options, based on concerns that they or their child had voiced about their present school situation. In most cases, their requests for information were responded to in a timely and satisfactory fashion.

Most students reported that their parents were instrumental in introducing them to the school choice option, and for the most part, it was their parents who pursued information from school personnel regarding the process for exploring school choice. A few learned about school choice options through their guidance counselors.

A few parents expressed concerns about the degree to which parents and students in general were aware of school choice options. One commented that *“I think a lot of kids don’t realize the opportunity is there, and just stick to where they are.”*

As mentioned in the Data Collection, Analysis and Limitations Section, we informally interviewed between eight and twelve male and female students at five of the sites visited. At four of the sites, the vast majority of students had no knowledge of school choice options. Of those that had a limited knowledge based their responses on experiences with students who had come to their school or a friend who had left the school through the program. However, students in one site were familiar with a variety of school choice options, including the use of the school choice lottery, enrollment in regional vocational/technical schools, and choice options available to students living in surrounding communities without high schools.

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Reasons Parents and Students Pursue School Choice

Parents and students identified a variety of “push” and “pull” criteria that motivated their pursuit of school choice. In some cases the criteria was clear, and mainly concerned the perceived benefit of attending their choice school. In most other cases, parents and students reported a blend of motivating criteria including dissatisfaction in the original school and the perceived benefit of attending their choice school.

A majority of the parents and students interviewed reported that they pursued school choice because of a perception that their choice school would provide increased opportunities above and beyond their original school. Examples of increased opportunities included the following:

- **Social opportunities:** A number of students sought increased opportunities for social interaction and new peer groups. In a small number of cases, students reported that they had been bullied and harassed in their previous schools. One parent commented that *“My daughter’s last school was not one she could thrive in. She was part of the foster system and had learning issues and very few friends. She fell through the cracks at that school, but is doing better now.”* Another student, who had changed schools for social reasons, commented that *“I liked the community of the new school better.”*
- **Athletics and extracurricular/elective opportunities:** Examples included specific sports not available at the student’s home school, an opportunity to play in a higher or lower sports division, and additional extracurricular opportunities such as theater, dance, or drama not available at the student’s home school. One parent said, *“We changed for one reason: football!”* A student was pleased with her new school because she felt that *“all sports are valued in the same way...people don’t favor one sport over another.”*
- **Opportunities to attend a larger or smaller school.** Some students wished to attend a larger or smaller school that would offer a different sense of community and culture. One parent, whose daughter moved to a smaller school, reported that *“she didn’t feel so lost at her new school. The people there were friendly to her from the first day.”* Another parent, whose son moved to a larger school, noted that *“there was a different social mix and more electives offered.”* Similarly, one student commented that *“I liked the idea of*

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smaller school. I felt lost at my last school,” while another reported that “I wanted a bigger school with more kids and more classes.”

- **Enhanced academics:** Examples included Advanced Placement (AP) classes, broader range of curricula, better teachers, specific academic programs not available in the student’s originating school (e.g., digital imaging, technical programs, electives). One parent commented that *“My son had taken all the requirements by the end of his 10th grade year. His school had the bare minimum to offer, but the new school had a lot more choices.”* A student reported that *“The schooling was definitely better at my new school, especially math, science, and English.”* Another student reported that in her new school, *“the teachers had good teaching styles. They taught to all levels.”*

Additional reasons for pursuing school choice included changes in family residency, resulting a potential change in schools that students and parents wished to avoid, and parents who were teachers or administrators in schools that they or their child wanted to attend. Finally, a small number of respondents indicated that their choice school was located closer to their home than was their original school.

Degree to Which Transportation Posed a Barrier to School Choice

Parents and students had mixed responses to the question of whether or not transportation posed a barrier to school choice. Those who did not identify transportation as a barrier reported that students drove themselves, were driven by their parents, or were able to take a connecting school bus or public transportation to their school of choice. It is important to note that public transportation was utilized in only a small number of cases.

Parents and students who saw transportation as an issue or inconvenience cited specific challenges such as: the need for parents to decrease their work schedule in order to provide more time for driving; the need for parents to buy a car for their child, causing financial hardship; and the general challenge of parents spending more time driving their children to and from school and extracurricular activities. Expressions of parents’ frustrations were captured in the following ways:

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- *“I had to decrease my hours at work to drive my daughter to school every day, which in turn resulted in a loss of income.”*
- *“I had to buy my son his own car to get him back and forth.”*
- *“I have been a taxi for a long time.”*

Satisfaction with Participation in School Choice

Virtually all of the parents and students interviewed reported that they were generally or even extremely satisfied with the quality of education that students experienced in their schools of choice. Most found that the increased opportunities (e.g. social, co-curricular activities, or instructional opportunities) that had motivated them to seek choice were in fact realized in their schools of choice. For these parents and students, the benefits of expanded opportunities nearly always outweighed any inconveniences associated with school choice (e.g., transportation, the need to make new friends, etc.). One parent commented that *“It wasn’t about me being satisfied. It’s about her being satisfied...It was the best thing we could have done,”* while another reported that *“when I walk in the door at my son’s new school, the principal always says hello. They have the best guidance counselor...she is the reason for my son’s success.”* A student who had moved primarily for social reasons noted that *“Kids in my last school snubbed new kids a lot. On the first day in my new school, the kids introduced me to teachers and sat with me at lunch. They were really open and welcomed me.”* Yet another student expressed general satisfaction with everything about her new school, commenting that *“I am so happy I did it. I really love it there.”*

Benefits and Challenges Associated with School Choice

The benefits of school choice reported by the parents and students interviewed tend to reflect their original reasons for pursuing the program, and thus the perception was that their individual needs were met. Specific benefits were identified in relation to academics, social context, co-curricular activities, or a continuity of education supported by the opportunity for students to remain in a school following a move by their family. Examples of the benefits reported by parents included *“Because of her involvement with all of the new sports teams, I saw choice work wonders on her self-esteem,”* and *“The choice process bolstered my son’s confidence about*

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making a change and going away from what he knew. It showed his that there were good things happening elsewhere.” One student commented that *“my new school gave me exposure to a wider range of people,”* while another reported that *“I learned I could adapt to a new school and make new friends.”*

Very few challenges were reported by students and parents. Among those reporting challenges, the majority identified transportation as an issue that needed to be overcome. In addition, a small number of students and parents cited difficulties with the transition process from one school to another. Of these, several returned to their home schools after several weeks.

Changes in Level of Parent Involvement

Overall, parents reported that their level of involvement in their son/daughter’s school was unchanged from the time period prior to the school choice commitment. Parents’ involvement increased during the application process, however, it returned to its previous level once their son or daughter began attendance at their school of choice. Several parents were pleased to note that school choice actually reduced the amount of “negative” communications with their school over their child’s welfare.

Suggestions and Other Comments

While most students and parents were satisfied with the current school choice program, a few had suggestions for improvement. These included more options for transportation, and more widespread dissemination of school choice as an option. One parent expressed an opinion held by others when he stated that *“there should be a wider selection of schools participating in school choice, not just those that have developed local or regional agreements.”* Another parent who was very concerned about transportation and related equity issues said *“When you live in a rural area such as Vermont, school choice isn’t really a choice. There are so few options that you can go to...and the transportation is virtually impossible.”* Finally, several parents commented on the school choice application process, with one summarizing it as a *“...difficult time. The process should be clearer and more friendly. We thought the lottery system was stressful.”* Some students indicated that school choice had benefited them personally, and thought it would be a good idea if

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more students were able to participate in the program. *“It’s been so great for me,”* one student said. *“I wish more kids could take advantage of it.”*

Overall Conclusions

Overall, it appears that the current school choice program enacted through Act 150 is meeting the needs of students and families who seek expanded opportunities in six primary areas, including 1) academic options, 2) athletics, 3) family re-location, 4) social relations, 5) geographic location, and 6) a desire for either a larger or smaller school context. The current school choice process is clearly focused on meeting the individual needs of students and families, and according to nearly all interviewees, is largely successful in meeting that goal.

In spite of general support for the current school choice policy, about three quarters of the administrators interviewed were concerned about potential expansion of the program and related consequences. One concern related to possible expansion of school choice options was the potential negative impact on small schools who might lose students in numbers that would threaten the schools’ continued existence and have a lasting impact on their sense of community. Another concern related to access and equity issues for students and parents with limited resources and/or knowledge of school choice options. Most superintendents and principals felt that if the program were to be significantly expanded, school funding would need to be changed dramatically in order to allow funds to follow students. Further, there would need to be more options for transportation and/or full funding for transportation to create equal opportunities for participation.

Appendix A. Interview Protocols with School Personnel, Parents and Students

**School Choice Project
Interview Questions:
Administrators, Guidance Counselors, and School Board Members**

1. Could you describe the materials and methods of communication used by your school to notify students and families of the application and selection process, and criteria for acceptance into the school choice program.
2. From your perspective, why did students and parents make the decision to pursue school choice?
3. What do you see as the primary reasons why students apply to school choice programs, but are not selected?
4. What are some of the reasons that students do *not* apply to participate in the school choice program?
5. To what degree do transportation issues present a barrier to choice? Please explain.
6. How satisfied are you with the current school choice process?
 - What is your impression of parent satisfaction with the school choice process?
 - Student satisfaction?
7. Do you believe that students receiving special education or other support services are receiving equal access to school choice? Please explain.
8. How has school choice affected parents' involvement in their children's education?
9. For those students who do not remain in their school choice placements, what has been the reason for the changes they have made?
10. What, if any, unintended outcomes are associated with this policy?
11. Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the way in which this policy can be implemented?

Code:
School District

School Choice Project
Interview Questions: Parents

1. Tell me a little about your son/daughter's involvement with school choice (e.g., where attending school, currently in choice program?).
2. How did you first find about the program, and to what degree did the school help your family to participate in it? Were you satisfied with the process?
3. Why did your son/daughter make the decision to pursue school choice?
4. Did transportation present any barriers to you in terms of school choice? Please explain.
5. How satisfied are you with your son/daughter's education in his/her current school?
6. Has participation in school choice made any differences in your level of involvement with the school?
7. What have been the benefits/challenges of the school choice program for your son/daughter?
8. Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the school choice program, or other comments?

Code:
School District:

School Choice Project
Interview Questions: Students

1. Tell me a little about your involvement with school choice (e.g., where attending school, currently in choice program?).

2. How did you first find about the program, and to what degree did the school help you to participate in it? Were you satisfied with the process?

3. Why did you make the decision to pursue school choice?

4. Did transportation present any barriers to you in terms of school choice? Please explain.

5. How satisfied are you with your education in your current school?

6. What have been the benefits/challenges of the school choice program for you?

7. Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the school choice program, or other comments?

Appendix B. Table 1

Table 1. Study Sites and Interviewee Counts

School Choice Participation Level (FY 03, FY 04 Avg.)	Total Interviews Conducted							
	Households			School Personnel				
	Total	Parents	Students	Total	Super	Principals/ Assistant Prin	Guidance	Board members

List of Choice Schools Participating in Intensive Case Study

1	PS124	GREEN MOUNTAIN	17	4	2	2	5	1	1	2	1
2	PS183	MILL RIVER	15.5	5	2	3	4	1	1	2	
3	PS191	MONTPELIER HIGH	13.5	4	2	2	5	1	1	2	1
4	PS253	RUTLAND SENIOR	12.5	4	2	2	4	1	1	1	1
5	PS305	U32 HIGH	10.5	4	2	2	5	1	3		1

List of Choice Schools Participating in Telephone Interviews

6	PS208	NORTH COUNTRY	9.5	4	2	2	3	1	1	1	
7	PS276	SPAULDING HSUD	9.5	4	2	2	4	1	2	1	
8	PS272	SO. BURLINGTON	8	4	2	2	4	1	1	1	1
9	PS331	WEST RUTLAND	6	2	1	1	2	1	1		
10	PS066	CHAMPLAIN VALLEY	5	5	2	3	4	1	1	1	1
11	PS346	WILMINGTON MIDDLE	3.5	4	2	2	3	1	1	1	
12	PS158	LAMOILLE UHSD	3	4	2	2	3	1	1	1	
13	PS237	RANDOLPH UHSD	3	4	2	2	2	1		1	
14	PS278	SPRINGFIELD HIGH	3	5	3	2	2	1	1		
15	PS304	TWINFIELD USD	3	5	3	2	3	1	1	1	
16	PS036	BLUE MOUNTAIN	2.5	2	1	1	2	1		1	
17	PS072	COLCHESTER HIGH ¹	1.5				3	1	1	1	
18	PS139	HAZEN UHSD ²	1.5	NA	NA	NA	3	1	1	1	
19	PS247	ROCHESTER SCHOOL ³	1				2	1	1		
20	PS338	WHITCOMB JR/SR ²	0.5	NA	NA	NA	2	1	1		

Total Interviews	64	32	32	65	20	21	18	6	129
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Notes: 1. Potential student contacts graduated by the fall of 2004 and were not available. 2. These high schools participated in school choice by transferring students to other high schools, but did not enroll any choice students. 3. The research team was unable to contact the one parent and student participating in school choice for inclusion in the study.